

Resting in Piece



REMEMBERING R.D. BURMAN ON HIS SEVENTH DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Dear Pancham,

Everyone wants a piece of Rahul Dev Burman. The vandalism/cannibalisation/theft/appropriation is given the name of remixes by the wannabe Panchams of today. You must be smiling bitterly at the turn of events. At the tail-end of your life no one had the guts or foresight to use your unfathomable talents.

To add insult to injury, your own friends and dear ones went and sang some of these cheap imitations of your masterpieces, thereby precipitating your downfall.

Everyone wanted a piece of you when you were alive. Everyone wants a piece of you now. Perhaps your epitaph should read, "Resting In Piece." When you passed away on January 4 1994, death must have almost seemed like a release. Apart from *Gulzar saab*, who stood by your colossal talent to your very end, the entire movie industry had turned its collective back on you. Film-makers who built their careers around your music turned their sights on more saleable sounds.

The biggest blow to your career and self-esteem must have come when Subhash Ghai signed you for *Ram Lakhan* and then dropped you like a *garam aloo* for good old Laxmikant-Pyarelal.

Ironically, the L-P fixated Raj Khosla opted for you in *Sunny*. And what fabulous songs you created for the film—like *Jaane kya baat hai neend nahin aati*.

If only *Sunny* had clicked. But the film and its music came during the darkest phase of your career the 1980s when everything you did turned into coal. Ironically, you did some of your life's best work during this prolonged season of famine. *Sunny*, *Saveray Wali Gadi*, *Lava*, *Manzil Manzil* (your final collaboration with Nasir Husain), *Jurmana*, *Shaan*, *Alibaba Aur Chalis Chor*, *Maati Muange Khoon*, *Ek Main Aur Ek Tu* (the film that Raveena Tandon's father made to launch her brother as a hero) and *Aar Paar*.

There were at least 200 films during this phase which flopped, and down the drain went their marvellous music scores. During those days there was no satellite TV to give film songs a life and success independent of the

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films. If there had been, all your enchanting efforts which went to waste in the 1980s would have been recognised.

Those must have been dark and desperate days for you. But then, when was life ever easy for you as Sachin Dev Burman's son?

Going into a flashback I see you in your shorts listening intently to your father recording a song for his favourite 'Lota'. I see your resolve to one day compose a worthy song for Lata Mangeshkar. That day came in 1961 when you shyly went up to Lataji and said, "Didi, I'm turning full-fledged composer and I want you to sing my first song." That song was *Ghar aaja ghir aaye badra sanwariya* (*chhote Nawab*).

The first break almost didn't happen. You were supposed to start your career as an independent composer with Guru Dutt's *Raas*. But after a few reels, he shelved the film leaving your future uncertain. Until Mehmood bhai came to the rescue. You breathed a sigh of relief thinking your struggle was over. But the struggle had just begun.

In spite of lilting *raga*-based songs like *Ghar aaja*, *Aaja piya tohe pyar doon* (*Baharon Ki Manzil*) and *O Ganga maiyya paar lagade* (*Chandan Ka Palna*), no film-maker was willing to touch you. They all said your father was ghost-composing your songs!

The *Teesri Manzil* sound was born out of sheer helplessness. You HAD to sound different from your father. Like Sadhana's fringed forehead and Rajesh Khanna's *kurtas*, the R.D. Burman style of composition was sparked by a career crisis.

Even when you found your metier as the rock-'n'-roll king, you continued to create *raga*-based songs throughout your career to rival and even outrace those composed by your father: *Sharm aati hai magar* (*Padosan*), *Raina beeti jaaye* (*Amar Prem*), *Babul tere baaga ni mein bulbul* (*Jheel Ke Uss Par*), *Do nainon mein aansoon bhare hain* (*Khushboo*), *Aaja mere pyar aaja* (*Heeralal Pañnalal*) and *Har din to beeta* (*Kitaab*).

These are just some of your gems born to languish unseen. I wish today's enterprising remixers would do their thing to some of these numbers—so today's generation would know how deep and impenetrable your talent was and how wrong we were to laud you only for your westernised songs. Even there, your supposed forte, you had to face a lot of opposition and cynicism.

Bhupen Hazarika tells me of an incident after your *Dum maro dum* in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* became a rage. During a visit to Assam, your mother expressed a wish to take orchids back to Mumbai with her. The notoriously obdurate Burman *dada* shook his head. "No. Just as you cannot transpose Western music into Indian soil, you cannot uproot flowers from their natural habitat."

Pancham, you did the seemingly impossible. You made the world a musical oyster. If on one end Lata Mangeshkar gave voice to the ethereal *Raina beeti jaaye*, on the other end sister Asha Bhosle captivantly crooned *Piya tu ab to aaja*. And all along your favourite singer remained Kishore Kumar.

Where were all your well-wishers, friends and admirers in your dark days? Some of them re-surfaced after your death to make statements in the press, not caring a fig for your ailing, senile mother who until her last breath remained alone in the flat you shared with her, thinking her only son was still alive.

If talent of your proportions can come to such a bitter end what can we say about the quality of life in showbiz? *Kuch na kaho, kuch bhi na kaho, kya kehna hai kya sun-na hai?*

Yours admiringly,

SKJ

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